

Abstract 412

TITLE: Chicken Little and Emerging Risk Patterns in Gay Urban Settings

AUTHORS: Fallon, SJ

ISSUE: Early studies of AIDS progression suggested that HIV-positive individuals who continued risky behaviors might become reinfected with a “superpathogenic” strain of HIV. Newer understanding of HIV pathogenesis refutes these beliefs. As health professionals try to counsel persons living with HIV to avoid risky sexual contact, a backlash has arisen, particularly in urban areas with mobilized gay populations. Coinciding with the community's debate about “HIV neutrals” (supposedly noncontagious persons with undetectable viral load), primary and secondary HIV-prevention programs face some of their greatest challenges to date.

SETTING: Broward County, FL, records the nation's fifth highest number of AIDS cases, and is home to an estimated 70,000 gay men. Other urban areas will also be reviewed.

PROJECT: The lead ASO/CBO sought to educate the gay community about viral dynamics and transmission, but found that traditional workshops lacked the reach to influence the changing cultural norms. The agency then implemented a new community driven, state-funded program targeting gay men. The three-tier program features street outreach, narrow casting, and community-building events.

RESULTS: The street outreach and events tiers have reached 15,000 gay men/youths to date. The softer sell on HIV prevention has led to increased requests for the information packs detailing the reinfection and “HIV-neutral” issues. Copies of info flyers, posters, and palm cards will be shared with participants. Barriers and opportunities in participants' local communities will also be discussed.

LESSONS LEARNED: Communities are weary of maintaining “red alert” status, and dangerous myths can take hold. Interventions that soft-sell their messages may have greater success reaching the target population.

PRESENTER CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Stephen J. Fallon, Ph.D.

Director of Education, Center One, Inc.

Address: 2817 E. Oakland Park Blvd.

Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33306

Telephone: (954) 587-4111, x110

Fax: (954) 563-9737

E-mail: sjfallon@aol.com